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	MOF-00	M-00	VCIE-00	NRC-00	NSAE-00	ISN-00	OCS-00
	NIMA-00	PA-00	PM-00	GIWI-00	PRS-00	P-00	ISNE-00
	DOHS-00	FMPC-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	USSS-00
	NCTC-00	ASDS-00	CBP-00	BBG-00	IIP-00	SCRS-00	PMB-00
	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00	SCA-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: NWFP: GOOD ELECTION NEWS FOR ANP

REF: 09 PESHAWAR 161

CLASSIFIED BY: Candace Putnam, Consul General, U.S. Consulate
Peshawar.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. In by-elections January 28, the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) ruling Awami National Party (ANP) won the election in Swat, trouncing the religious parties' candidate. In Mansehra, poor strategic choices by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) cost the party the seat, which went to an irreligious member of the religious Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) party. The Swat race showed the ANP's continued potency in the Malakand Division, once a religious party stronghold. The Mansehra race deepened divisions within the NWFP chapter of the PML-N, a major potential ANP rival in the next general election. In Swat, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) backed the ANP candidate, and it fielded a weak candidate in Mansehra. Jamiat-i-Islami (JI) re-entered the electoral fray and lost in both contests; despite this poor showing, JUI-F leader Fazlur Rehman visited Peshawar for talks about reforming the previous alliance of religious parties. For all its faults, the ANP seems without a credible challenger for provincial leadership (septel). End Summary.

12. (SBU) On January 28, the NWFP held elections to determine the succession to two parliamentary seats vacated by the deaths of the officials who had held them. In Swat, the election was to fill a seat in the Provincial Assembly previously held by Dr. Shamsheer Ali Khan, an ANP-affiliated MPA killed by a suicide bomber at his home in December 2009. In Mansehra, a district in the formerly earthquake-affected Hazara region of NWFP, the seat contested was in the National Assembly and had been occupied by PML-N-affiliated Faiz Mohammad Khan, who died in December 2009 of natural causes.

ANP Wins, Religious Parties Lose in Swat

13. (SBU) In Swat, the ANP nominated the deceased MPA's brother

Rehmat Ali Khan and had received the backing of most of the other secular parties, including PPP, for his candidacy. Security worries somewhat restricted the ability of parties to campaign (septel) and depressed turnout to around 16,000 total voters. (Note: The electoral district, in Kabal and Matta areas of Swat, had been the heartland of pro-militant sentiment prior to the April-July 2009 military operation in the Malakand Division.) Nonetheless, the ANP candidate won the four-way race with a massive plurality, gaining well over twice as many votes as his nearest rival, a Pakistan Muslim League candidate who drew votes primarily from the lower-class Gujar ethnic group (reftel).

¶4. (C) The most striking feature of the election result, however, was the plight of the JI candidate, a former provincial minister who - despite the backing of the JUI-F, his greater ability to campaign without fear of militant attack, and the religious bent of the electoral district - received the fewest total votes. In the immediate wake of the vote, the JI candidate claimed electoral fraud (along with the two other losing candidates); however, the JI candidate has not backed his claim; Malakand-area JI member Sahibzada Tariqullah confirmed that the scope of the defeat has left the JI leadership grappling with the question of how to reverse their party's slide in provincial politics. JUI-F leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman visited former JI leader Qazi Hussain Ahmad on January 31 to discuss the prospects for re-forming the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), the dormant all-religious party alliance which controlled the provincial government from 2002-2008.

PML-N Loss in Mansehra Prompts Further Internal Conflict

¶5. (SBU) The implications of the by-election in Mansehra are less clear-cut than those in Swat. In this race, held in a district divided between ethnic Pashtuns and Hindko-speaking "Hazarajats," the PML-N squandered its natural advantage of incumbency when party leader Nawaz Sharif intervened to ensure that the brother of his own son-in-law received the nomination rather than the daughter of the deceased MNA. In the wake of this decision, three other locally powerful candidates announced themselves and local political dynasties rearranged themselves around these candidates; a few other minor party candidates also ran without much local support. In the close-fought race, in which over 125,000 voted, the JUI-F candidate Laiq Mohammad defeated his closest rival by a margin of 5,000 votes. The PML-N candidate, while polling respectably in absolute terms, finished an embarrassing fourth place behind a PML candidate (supported by prominent local independents) and a PPP candidate (supported by the ANP). The winning candidate, a brother of the relatively secular but JUI-F-affiliated federal Science and Technology Minister Azam Swati (a former U.S. resident), is a landed politician better known for his populism than for any personal piety or religious enthusiasm.

¶6. (C) In a fortuitously timed meeting in Peshawar with the NWFP leadership of the PML-N on January 29, Nawaz Sharif attempted to shore up the unity of the party's base after its unnecessary electoral defeat and to push the election out of the headlines. Speaking to the press in Peshawar, Nawaz attacked President Zardari for hiding behind his immunity rather than submitting himself to the judgment of Pakistan's courts. But according to former NWFP Provincial Assembly Speaker Shahzada Gustasip, Nawaz spent most of the non-televised portion of the meeting defending his own actions and resolving quarrels between NWFP PML-N leaders.

¶7. (C) These quarrels are substantial and have been deleterious to the PML-N's ability to organize itself in the NWFP. The loss of the Mansehra seat cuts the number of PML-N MNAs to three out of the NWFP's 35-member delegation - all of these from the party's stronghold in southern Hazara. The party's principal Pashtun NWFP leaders, Iqbal Jhagra and Saranjam Khan, see the party's pro-Hindko stance (which has included a strong resistance to the ANP's initiative to rename the NWFP as Pakhtunkhwa) as harmful to its electoral prospects in the NWFP outside of Hazara. By contrast, former NWFP PML-N leader Pir

Sabir Shah and current NWFP PML-N leader Sardar Mehtab Ahmad Khan, both from southern Hazara, have fought attempts to pitch the party's appeals to Pashtuns and risk alienating its supporters in Hazara. According to Gustasip, this basic strategic dispute was papered over by an agreement to form a commission and probe the reasons for the PML-N loss, but bad feelings remain.

Comment

18. (C) Consulate contacts unanimously point to the ANP as the principal victor in the January 28 by-elections. The party's resounding victory in Swat, while admittedly a product of extremely favorable circumstances, is a good rejoinder to claims by commentators and rivals of an anti-ANP backlash in Malakand due to the party's corruption, early mishandling of the militancy problem and more recent slowness of reconstruction there. The abysmal showing of the religious parties' candidate in their former Malakand stronghold indicates that these parties will have serious problems in winning elections there in the future. The PML-N fiasco in Mansehra has both highlighted the organizational weakness of that party and further weakened that party's unity; Nawaz's meddling will diminish the likelihood of prominent NWFP politicians defecting to the PML-N in the future.

For all of the ANP's faults, the party currently seems bereft of a credible challenger for future leadership of the NWFP. End comment.

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